



Senator Feinstein, Law Enforcement, Consumer Groups Urge  
Congress to Bolster Identity Theft Laws  
March 29, 2005

**Riverside, Calif.** – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) was joined today by law enforcement, consumer groups and identity theft victims to call for passage of federal legislation requiring that consumers be notified when their personal data is compromised.

Riverside District Attorney Grover Trask, Riverside Sheriff Robert Doyle, Los Angeles District Attorney Steve Cooley, Gail Hillebrand of the California Consumers Union and identity theft victims joined Senator Feinstein at a news conference also to urge better safeguards on Social Security numbers and other sensitive personal information used by identity thieves.

The news conference followed the revelation Monday that a laptop computer containing Social Security numbers of more than 98,000 graduate students, graduate school applicants and other individuals was stolen from an unlocked office at UC Berkeley.

**“The incident at Berkeley was the latest in a series of recent compromises of Social Security numbers or other personal financial information that could be used by identity thieves and it clearly demonstrates the need for a comprehensive approach to identity theft in order to give Americans more control over their personal information,”** Senator Feinstein said.

**“Anyone who has had their identity stolen knows what it’s like when you have to spend such time and energy to get your own identity back,”** Senator Feinstein said. **“This is especially a problem in the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario area, which has the second highest number of identity theft complaints per capita of any metropolitan area in the United States.”**

Earlier today, Senator Feinstein wrote the leadership of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science to restore funding to the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance grant program, which the Bush Administration eliminated in its FY2006 budget request. The program received \$634 million in FY2005.

Byrne grants are vital to law enforcement nationwide and in California they provide funding for five task forces operating throughout the State that investigate hi-tech and identity theft crimes.

Senator Feinstein sent a letter to Appropriations Committee Chairman Thad Cochran (R-Miss.) and Ranking Member Robert Byrd (D-W.V.) with the request for Byrne Grant funding. Senator Feinstein also sent a similar letter to Senators Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) and Barbara

Mikulski (D-Md.), Chairman and Ranking Member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science, which has jurisdiction over the issue.

**“The Byrne grant program is vital to law enforcement nationwide, and in California for instance, it provides funding for programs such as the Hi-Technology Theft Apprehension and Prosecution program. Byrne grant funding goes toward the investigation of hi-tech and identity theft crimes by five hi-tech task forces which operate throughout California,”** Senator Feinstein wrote.

**“Identity theft is a crime which can affect all of us. The recent security breaches involving individuals’ personal data obtained by identity thieves, such as at ChoicePoint, highlight the importance of ensuring that hi-tech and identity theft task forces continue to receive funding. This funding will be all the more important if Congress moves forward on legislation this year, which I believe it will, to create a federal standard for notification of individuals when their personal data has been compromised.”**

### **Background**

Senator Feinstein has introduced three bills that would give Americans more control over their personal data and help them restore their good name when their information has been stolen:

- First is legislation that would require ChoicePoint and companies like it to notify affected individuals if there is a breach in their data system. This is an expansion of California law. *A Judiciary Committee hearing is scheduled April 13 on the bill.*
- Second is legislation that would set a national standard for the protection of personal information. It would essentially require companies to ask consumers whether they would allow their most sensitive personal information to be sold (opt-in). And for less critical data, consumers could tell companies that they don’t want their data sold (opt-out).
- Third, is legislation that would prohibit the sale or display of Social Security numbers to the general public without individuals’ knowledge and consent. It would also prohibit government entities from displaying these numbers on public records that are posted on the Internet after the legislation’s effective date, as well as, prohibit the printing of Social Security numbers on government checks.